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The Shape of Utnapishtim's Ark: A Rejoinder

By Steven W. Holloway

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R. S. Hendel's brief reply to my article on ancient Near Eastern flood narratives and temple ideology¹ has provided an opportunity for further reflection on the text of the Gilgamesh Epic. The point of contention involves the interpretation of the ark in Gilg XI, which is called a »boat« (giš.má = *eleppu*), Gilg XI.24, 28, 76, 84, 88, 93, 94, 140, 141, 171, 189, and perhaps »palace« (é.gal = *ekallu*)², Gilg XI.95, but whose dimensions, as presented in Ea's blueprint, define an object whose metrical length, width, and height are identical.³ Gilg XI.58, 10 nindam.ta.àm im-ta-ḫir ki-bir muḫ-ḫi-ša, »the edges of its top

¹ The Shape of Utnapishtim's Ark, ZAW 107 (1995), 128 f.

² A. Schott and W. von Soden, Das Gilgamesch-Epos, 1984, 97, and K. Hecker, Das akkadische Gilgamesch-Epos, in: TUAT III/4, Mythen und Epen II, 732, interpret this passage as a dirty trick played on the boatman Puzur-Amurru, who receives a soon-to-be-inundated palace for his labor; S. Dalley, Myths from Mesopotamia: Creation, the Flood, Gilgamesh and Others, 1989, 112, siding with most other commentators, reads *ekallu* here as a metaphor for the ark.

³ Hendel, Shape, 129, following Dalley, Myths, 38 n. 43, contends on the basis of OB Atrahasis III.vi.5 *makurru* that the original dimensions of the ark in Atrahasis were those of a »large cargo vessel shaped like the gibbous moon« (use of the homophone *makkuru*, »possessions« in III.i.24 is irrelevant, *pace* H. A. Hoffner, Jr., Enki's Command to Atrahasis, in: B. L. Eichler ed., Kramer Anniversary Volume: Cuneiform Studies in Honor of Samuel Noah Kramer, AOAT 25, 1976, 241–245; see B. R. Foster, Before the Muses: An Anthology of Akkadian Literature, vol. I: Archaic, Classical, Mature, 2nd ed., 1996, 202). CAD M/1, *makurru*, 141 2', indicates that giš.má.gur₈ and giš.má could be used as synonyms in literary texts. OB Atrahasis repeatedly identifies the ark simply as »boat« (*eleppu*, III.i.22, 24, 25; ii.55). The MB fragment CBS 13532 calls it a »big boat« (giš.má *ra-bi-tam*, 1.6, giš.má.gur.gur, 1.8); Late Assyrian DT 42 (W) = CT 46 15 is content with »boat« (giš.má, ll. 6', 13', 15'). M. Civil's remarks on the name of the ark in the Sumerian flood story, giš.má.gur₄.gur₄, ll. 205, 207, 208, are worth quoting: »The only thing we know about this type of boat is its large size«, in W. G. Lambert and A. R. Millard, Atrahasis: The Babylonian Flood Story, 1969, 171; similar is the treatment of this word by W. H. P. Römer, Die Flutgeschichte, in: TUAT III/3, Mythen und Epen I, 456, »sehr großen Schiffe«. Conclusion: none of the terms used for the ark in any of the surviving portions of Atrahasis offer a clue as to its dimensions. A portion of one word survives of Ea's instructions to Atrahasis regarding the dimensions of the ark: »the boat which you build [x x x] be equal [x x]« (*mi-it-ḫ[u-ra-at x x]*, III.i.25–26, preserved only in MAH 16064, following Lambert and Millard, Atrahasis, 89, restoration confidently based on the parallel verse in Gilg XI.30, »let its breadth and length be equal« [(l)u mithur rupusa

were equal at ten »rods« each» would seem to clinch the shape as that of a cube, which is indeed the Assyriological *communis opinio* as Hendel notes. Or is it cube? Hendel misrepresents my case as being primarily a philological argument, my »error« turning on the mistranslation of *muhhiša* in line 58. The reading of the cuneiform text by Hendel & co. is literally accurate: the question left begging by the literal reading is the semantics of the text and the cultural milieu in which it was composed.⁴ Although the shape of Uta-napišti's ark is a source of perennial fascination and scholarly speculation, it is the cognitive map of the ancient Mesopotamian temple that imparts meaning to the various flood narratives and controls not only the cosmological function of the ark, but also the architectural forms available for its visualization. If,

Like a princely boat (má.gur₈/giš.má.gur₈) floating in the sky

Like a sacred boat at the »loading«-gate

Like the boat of heaven, the lordly crown of the mountains⁵,

the Keš temple could be likened to a heavenly seafaring boat, then it is conceivable that a mythological boat belonging to Mesopotamia's greatest hero could draw upon the imagery associated with the temple.

Allusions to Temples within the Story

The entire narrative frame of SB Gilg is cast in the motif of an ancient document, a *narû* of lapis-lazuli fetched by the reader from a copper chest (I.i.22–26), that contains secrets revealed to Gilgamesh and »knowledge of days from before the deluge« (*lām abūbi*, I.i.5–6). In the *Legend of Narām-Sîn* a similar »document« is deposited in the temple of Nergal at Cuthah, and we, the circumspect readers of SB Gilg, are made cognizant that the »original« text was carefully laid away by Gilgamesh in É.an.na, the temple of Ištar of Uruk. Repetition of whole phrases (I.i.16–19//XI.303–305) and a bald reference to the deluge in I.i.5–6 link the end-redaction of SB Gilg with the hand that inserted the deluge narrative reworked from Atraḥasīs in Gilg XI.⁶

u mūrakša). In all probability the ark of Atraḥasīs had a square draft, like that of Gilg XI; its vertical configuration remains unknown.

⁴ The recent reflections of an Assyriologist on his discipline are instructive: »The interpretation of texts from ancient Mesopotamia is dominated by a strongly anti-theoretical philological tradition that often looks with derision and suspicion at attempts to discuss hermeneutic issues.« P. Michalowski, *Presence at the Creation*, in: *Lingering Over Words: Studies in Ancient Near Eastern Literature in Honor of William L. Moran*, T. Abusch, J. Huehnergard, and P. Steinkeller, eds., 1990, 381.

⁵ Keš Temple Hymn, I 24–26; translation prepared from editions in TCS 3, 168; T. Jacobsen, *The Harps That Once ... Sumerian Poetry in Transition*, 1987, 379; M. J. Geller, *Jacobsen's »Harps« and the Keš Temple Hymn*, ZA 86 (1996), 69–73 (based on BM 115798, unavailable either to Gragg or Jacobsen). In a passage from this ancient hymn dating to the 3rd millennium, the temple is described by means of lunar imagery.

⁶ On these matters see O. R. Gurney, *The Sultantepe Tablets IV: The Cuthan Legend of Naram-Sîn*, AnSt 5 (1955), 93–113; C. Wilcke, *Die Anfänge der akkadischen Epen*, ZA 67 (1977), 201 n. 79; J. H. Tigay, *The Evolution of the Gilgamesh Epic*, 1982, 144–146; W. Moran, *The Gilgamesh Epic: A Masterpiece from Ancient Mesopotamia*, in: J. M. Sasson et al., eds., *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East*, 1995, 4:2331–2332. Whether an exorcist priest by the name of Sîn-lege-unninni was ever more than a

In Gilg XI.42 Ea instructs Uta-napišti to tell the citizens of Shuruppak that, having been forced to leave the realm of Enlil, he will [ur-r]ad-ma ana abzu and dwell with Ea. A multiple entendre, the literal sense intended to deceive the curious populace has Uta-napišti going to live at Eridu in Ea's temple, É.abzu. At another level, the primed reader understands the descent into the *apsû* as an allusion to the coming boat ride on the flood waters. An additional level of meaning comes from the cosmological symbolism associated with Mesopotamian temples and ziqqurrats, which, as the nexus of heaven and earth, were stationed over the chaos waters of the *apsû*.

The construction of the ark has its closest analogue in the Mesopotamian stepped temple tower or ziqqurrat. The ark itself has six roofs (*√ruggubu*) and is divided into seven compartments or storeys. Gilg XI.60–61, »I roofed it (*urtaggiši*) six times, I divided it (*aptarassu*) seven times«, is ambiguous. The uncommon denominative verb is based on a common word for a covering over a habitable space or roof, *rugbu*, amply attested in the construction of temples and private houses, but not boats. In both OB Atraḥasīs III.i.29 and SB Gilg XI.31 the ark-builder is commanded to »roof it over« (*šullulu*) like the *apsû*; *šullulu* is the standard verb for creating shade or making a roof.⁷ All commentators accept Gilg XI.60–61 as a description of the creation of seven storeys within the ark. Gilg XI.62, »its interior (*qerbīssu*) I divided nine times« suggests, by fronting the substantive *qerbu*, that the preceding section was concerned with the exterior construction, a curious narrative strategy if the exterior is visualized as a smooth vertical surface. Ziqqurrats, as solid structures with the exception of the small shrine or temple (*nuhar*, *kiššu elû*, *šahûru*) at the summit, were not roofed with wooden beams, and indeed the only unambiguous expression for the storeys of a Mesopotamian temple tower is *rikbu* (u₃).⁸ Possible interpretation of the structural numbers in Gilg XI.61–63 include: (1) The author is engaging in pure invention for the sake of narrative interest – the giant boat needed storeys and compartments: seven decks and nine compartments (per deck?) were arbitrarily chosen. In defense of this position, seven is the favored narrative »formula« number of the SB Gilg.⁹ Furthermore, seven is the magic number par excellence in Mesopotamian thought: there are seven *utukkus*, seven antediluvian sages, a divine heptad (the Sebetti), seven gates of the underworld (Ištar's Descent), Ninurta's seven-headed mace, etc.¹⁰ (2) The author is

legend, and what role, if any, he played in the redaction of Gilg, are topics tabled for lack of hard evidence.

⁷ In VS 15 39 and its duplicates, 40 and 49, a Seleucid-era legal contract from Uruk, a *ruggubbu* is the object of *šullil* (VS 15 39:38 [VAT 8560]; 40:37 [VAT 8565]; 49 rev. 6 [VAT 9170]).

⁸ F. H. Weißbach, WVD OG 59, 54, rev. 38–42 (AO 6555, the so-called E-sagila Tablet that describes É.temen.an.ki, the ziggurat of Marduk in Babylon); see the commentary in A. R. George, *Babylonian Topographical Texts*, OLA 40, 1992, 430–433.

⁹ Examples collected by D. O. Edzard, *Zahlen, Zählen und Messen im Gilgames-Epos*, in: W. Gross, H. Irsigler, and T. Seidl, eds., *Text, Methode und Grammatik: Wolfgang Richter zum 65. Geburtstag*, 1991, 58 f. »Seven« is particularly frequent in Gilg XI: II. 127, 128, 145, 157, 218//228, 305.

¹⁰ On the symbolic use of the number seven in cuneiform literature, see the dated but still valuable treatment in J. Hehn, *Siebenzahl und Sabbat*, bei den Babyloniern und im Alten Testament, 1907, and J. Friberg, *Numbers and Counting*, in: ABD, 1992, 4:1143a–1144a. Although it is improbable that there is any connection between the seven storeys of the SB Gilg ark and historical Uruk, it is curious that four out of the five ceremonial names for Mesopotamian temples known to this author that use seven

making an oblique reference to cosmological symbolism with the seven levels of the ark. Hendel takes this position, basing his argument on an inference by J. Bottéro, who is said to believe that the ark was a microcosm reflecting a seven-fold division of the universe.¹¹ Consistent evidence for a seven-tiered conception of the universe in pre-Hellenistic Mesopotamia is tenuous, as Bottéro himself admits elsewhere.¹² While a speculative three-fold (and seven-fold) division of heaven occurs in a handful of late scholarly texts¹³, and there were divisions within the underworld¹⁴, Mesopotamian Geistesgeschichte most consistently describes the universe as a tripartite structure.¹⁵ This is an important point, for OB Atrahasis begins with the gods Anu, Enlil and Enki/Ea choosing their mutual spheres of authority within a three-tiered universe¹⁶, a theme repeated later in the story and retained in the Neo/Late Babylonian fragment BE 39099.¹⁷ Lacunae in tablet III of Atrahasis prevent us from knowing whether Atrahasis' ark was, like Uta-napišti's, a multi-

(imin) in their names occur in Uruk, including é.gi.pār.imin.na, »House of the Seven Giparus«, the ziqqurrat of Ištar of Uruk; the fifth ceremonial name is that of the ziqqurrat of é.zi.da at Borsippa, é.ur₄.(me).imin.an.ki, »House which Gathers the Seven (Me's) of Heaven and Underworld«; see A. R. George, *House Most High: The Temples of Ancient Mesopotamia*. Mesopotamian Civilizations 5, 1993, nos. 137. 384. 514. 1154. 1193.

¹¹ La première Arche de Noé, *L'Histoire* 94 (1986), 80 [article unavailable to me].

¹² Bottéro, *Mesopotamia: Writing, Reasoning, and the Gods*, tr. by Z. Bahrani, M. van der Mieroop, 1992, 274.

¹³ See references in A. Livingstone, *Mystical and Mythological Explanatory Works of Assyrian and Babylonian Scholars*, 1986, 78–83, including VAT 8917 obv. 30–rev. 3, and remarks in E. Reiner, *Astral Magic in Babylonia*, *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society*, 85/4, 1995, 21.

¹⁴ See the remarks by J. Scurlock, *Death and the Afterlife in Ancient Mesopotamian Thought*, in: J. M. Sasson et al, eds., *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East*, 1995, 3:1886–1887.

¹⁵ See the discussions in H. Hunger, *Kosmologie*, *RIA* 7:222a–223a; W. G. Lambert, *Kosmogonie*, *RIA* 7:218a–222a. »It may be suspected that more straightforward and lucid accounts of the setting up of the physical universe existed, to which allusions exist and of which the occasional fragment survives«, Lambert, 222a.

¹⁶ Atrahasis repeatedly situates the theater of activity in heaven (*šamū*, I.i.13, 17; ii.101; III.iii.48), or upper regions (*elēnum*, II.v.[16], 30; vi.25), earth/world of Enlil (*eršet* ^dEnlil, III.i.48; cf. *qaqqar* ^dEnlil, Gilg XI.41), lower earth/world (*eršetam šaplitam*, II.v.17. 31; vi.26), and *apsū* (I.i.18; III.i.49). See also the assignment of the cosmological realms in K. Hecker, *Die Kosmologie des kalū-Priesters*, in: TUAT III/4, *Mythen und Epen* II, 605.

¹⁷ See the remarks in Lambert and Millard, *Atra-ḥasis*, 8, 166. Atrahasis, the source of the flood story adapted for the »Standard Version« of the Gilgamesh Epic, is replete with overt references to temples. Enlil's temple É.kur is the locus of the revolt of the gods (Atrahasis I.ii.57–iii.133[?]). Words for temples and cellas include *šubtu* (I.ii.58, 60, 84), *atmānu* (I.ii.69), *bītu* (I.ii.71, 80; II.iii.11), *ešertu* (I.vii.337). In addition to the É.kur, mention is made of the temple of Namtara (I.viii.401) Adad (II.ii.20) and Ea (RS 22.421 obv. 7). Following the deluge, saved humanity's saving grace is the re-establishment of offerings to the gods (*niqū*, III.v.34–36).

storey affair¹⁸, or perhaps this detail was never specified in any version of Atrahasis. (3) The author is describing the stages of a ziqqurrat, the only architectural achievement in ancient Mesopotamia likely to have had as many as seven storeys.

In Gilg XI.156, following the grounding of the ark and the opening of the hatches, Uta-napišti tells Gilgamesh that he performed a regular offering *ina muḫḫi* (UGU) *ziq-qur-rat šadi* (KUR)¹⁹. CAD Z, s.v. *ziqqurratu*, cites approximately sixty occurrences of the word in the context of a temple tower, and one only with the transferred meaning of (mountain) peak: Gilg XI.156. Rejecting CAD and its unique reading of *ziqqurrat* in SB Gilg XI, I prefer a literal reading: the sacrifice was performed on the mountain peak which was itself a mountain ziqqurrat, since Uta-napišti's ark was resting upon the peak.²⁰ The sacrifice of appeasement offered to the hungry gods at the site of humankind's salvation, a *ziqqurrat*, roots the audience squarely in the familiar world of the temple cultus.

Ziqqurrat Names and Temple Cosmology

Several of the Sumerian ceremonial names for ziqqurrats highlight the cosmological nature of the structures as the nexus of the upper and nether regions: »House Which Gathers the Seven (Me's) of Heaven and Underworld« (Borsippa)²¹; »House, Pure Stairway of Heaven« (Sippar)²²; »House, Mountain/Noblest of the Universe« (Karkara?)²³ (Assur)²⁴; »House Which Guards Heaven and Underworld« (Cutha)²⁵; »Established House of Heaven and Underworld« (Dilbat)²⁶; »House, Bond of Heaven and Underworld« (Larsa)²⁷; »House, Foundation Platform of Heaven and Underworld« (Babylon)²⁸; »House Where Heaven and Underworld Mingle« (Assur)²⁹. The elements *abzu* (*apsū*) or *mar.uru*,

¹⁸ The unpublished tablets of Atra-ḥasis discovered at Sippar do not cover this portion of the story (private communication from A. R. George).

¹⁹ Schott and von Soden, *Gilgamesch*, 99: »Ein Schüttopfer spendete ich auf dem Gipfel des Berges«; M. G. Kovacs, *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, 1989, 102: »I offered incense in front of the mountain-ziqqurrat«; Dalley, *Myths*, 114: »[I] set out a *surqinnu*-offering upon the mountain peak«; Hecker, *Gilgamesch-Epos*, 732: »brachte ein Schüttopfer dar auf den Turmbau des Berges.«

²⁰ George, *House*, no. 1193. All translations of Sumerian ceremonial names are George's.

²¹ Ibid., no. 672.

²² Ibid., no. 89.

²³ Ibid., no. 90.

²⁴ Ibid., no. 1206.

²⁵ Ibid., no. 440.

²⁶ Ibid., no. 219.

²⁷ Ibid., no. 1088.

²⁸ Ibid., no. 417. Other ziqqurrat ceremonial names include »Pure House« (Dūr-Kurigalzu); »House Which Rivals Heaven« (Akkad); »House of the Great Niche(?)« (Akkad); »House, Dais of Wonder« (Akkad); »House, Temple-Tower, Exalted Abode« (Kiš); »House, Exalted Mountain« (Hursag-kalamma); »House of Exalted Radiance« (Hursag-kalamma); »House of the Mountain Wind« (Nippur, emended reading); »House of Secrets« (Nippur); »House, Great Wonder of Heaven« (Karkara?); »House of the King Who Lets Counsel Flourish« (Ur); »House of the Seven Giparus« (Uruk); »House, Temple-Tower« (Eridu); »Exalted Dais« (Uruk); »House, Skilfully-Built Mountain« (Nippur); »House, Big Mountain« (name of the *šahūru*-chapel at é.šār.ra

(*abūbu* = »deluge«) figure in the names of temples or dependent structures: »House of the Deluge« (Isin); »Mound in the Midst of *Apsū*« (entrance of a gate in É.sag.il of Babylon); »House of the Awesome Splendor of *Apsū*« (Nippur?); »Foremost House, Supporting Heaven from *Apsū*« (?), a temple of Ninurta. »House, *Apsū*« (é.abzu, éš.abzu) is a literary and theological trope used of temples and cosmic domains.²⁹ A late explanatory text suggestively describes giš.lam.šár.šár, the ceremonial name of the Adad ziqqurrat at Assur, as one of two »horses of the deluge«.³⁰ A hyperbole common in Sumerian and Akkadian literature is the exaggerated height and depth of temples, palaces, and city fortifications, whose foundations, it is boasted, stretch to the underworld (*arallū*, *eršetū*, *kigallū*) or *apsū*, and whose tops rival the heavens (*šamē*).³¹ Just such a metaphor appears in Gilg IX.ii.4–5 in connection with Mount Mašū, located at the edge of the world, »whose upper parts [reach(?)] the vault of heaven, whose breasts reach the underworld (*arallū*).« While the ceremonial names of many temples and ziqqurrats echo this hyperbolic image, emphasis on the function of these structures as cosmic addresses where heaven and the underworld are physically joined suggests that the ancient scribes perceived a distinction between mere monumentality in architecture and the possibilities inherent in sacred space.

Cultural Ubiquity of the Ziqqurrat; Cultural Insignificance of the Cube

The ubiquitous ziqqurrat. Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian lists indicate that major cult cities in Babylonia had at least one ziqqurrat; Nippur apparently had three.³² Ziqqurrats are known from texts and excavations in Assur (3), Kār-Tukulti-Ninurta, Nineveh, Kalḫu, and Dūr-Šarrukēn in Assyria. Temple-towers were also constructed in northern Mesopotamia (Tell Leilan [Šubat Enlil]³³, Harran³⁴), and Elam (Susa, Tchoga Zanbil)³⁵. Ziqqurrats were

of Assur); House of the Radiance of Heaven« (Assur); »House of the Universe« (Uruk); see *ibid.*, nos. 375. 63. 995. 121. 1151. 684. 772. 529. 956. 1146. 706. 384. 1150. 114. 480. 481. 765. 1036, respectively.

²⁹ The politically motivated theological and mythological syncretism between Eridu and Babylon may explain the unusual number of references to the *apsū* in the ceremonial names of É.sag.il; see George, *Texts*, 251 ff.

³⁰ E. Weidner, Ein astrologischer Sammeltext aus der Sargonidenzeit, *Afo* 19 (1959–1960), 110, ll. 40–42 (AO 8196). In the original article I have developed at considerable length the resonances between Mesopotamian flood stories and key cosmological conceptions of ancient Near Eastern temples, and would refer the interested reader there for further elaboration.

³¹ See the remarks and illustrations in George, *Texts*, 318 f.

³² K 2035A + 4337, and BM 51124 + 52640 (82-3-23,2120 + 3674), both published with handcopies, transcription, translation and commentaries in George, *House*, 45–49, pls. 13–14. K 2035A + 4337 lists the cities of Babylon, Borsippa, Nippur, KUR.TI (Parsā or Dūr-Kurigalzu), Sippar, Akkad, Kiš, Hursag-kalamma, Cutha, Dilbat, Marad, Ur, Larsa, Uruk, Eridu, and IM (Karkara?).

³³ H. Weiss, Tell Leilan on the Habur Plains of Syria, *BA* 48 (1985), 6–34.

³⁴ Known only from a single dedicatory inscription of Nabonidus; G. F. Dole and W. L. Moran, A Bowl of *alallu*-Stone, *ZA* 81 (1991), 268–273 (HSM 899.2.282).

³⁵ For a current bibliography of excavated ziqqurrats and related secondary literature, see H. Schmid, Der Tempelturm Etemenanki in Babylon, *Baghdader Forschungen* 17, 1995, xiv–xix.

represented in glyptics³⁶ and *kudurru*-stones³⁷. Schematic ziqqurrats, usually consisting of three symmetrical tiers, were often used for divine symbol socles³⁸; identical crenellations known as stepped merlons served as architectural facade elements on fortification walls, palaces, temples, and ziqqurrats themselves.³⁹ Amulets in the form of ziqqurrats are attested⁴⁰; apparently there was even a class of pastry chefs employed by Neo-Assyrian temples whose title intimates that their specialization entailed the production of ziqqurrat-cakes.⁴¹ By the first millennium at the latest, the artificial stepped mountain or ziqqurrat, imbued with centuries of liturgical and scholarly elaboration, had become a culturally pervasive symbol in Mesopotamia. The audience of the SB Gilg would not have had to strain after uncommon geometrical abstractions in order to interpret the shape of Uta-napišti's ark: they would have merely lifted their eyes to gaze at the familiar battlements and temple-towers on the city horizon.

Judging from extant cuneiform mathematical texts, Babylonian solid geometry developed only a limited interest in abstract forms like cubes, cones and pyramids.⁴² While »square« is attested several times as *miḫartu* (ib.sá)⁴³, the shape of a cube is expressed

³⁶ See examples in W. Andrae, *Altmesopotamische Zikkurat-Darstellungen*, MDOG 64 (1926), 44–50; T. Dombert, *Alt und neu Ziqqurrat-Darstellungen zum Babelturm-Problem*, *Afo* 5 (1928–1929), 220–229; numerous examples have appeared in more recent publications. An oversized lapis-lazuli cylinder seal, VA Bab 647, sports an image of Adad clad in a garment with what appears to be a five-storeyed ziqqurrat outlined on his breast; for a drawing of the image with the inscriptions, see D. Collon, *First Impressions: Cylinder Seals in the Ancient Near East*, 1987, no. 563; for a critical edition of the text with historical commentary, see G. Frame, *RIMB* 2, B.6.31.1. To my knowledge, there are no »cosmic cubes« in the glyptic art of ancient Mesopotamia.

³⁷ BM 90850, depicts a free-standing ziqqurrat, not a symbol socle; U. Seidl, *Die babylonischen Kudurru-Reliefs: Symbole mesopotamischer Gottheiten*, OBO 87, 1989, no. 62, fig. 8.

³⁸ Examples on Neo-Assyrian royal steles, especially the unique type dedicated to Sin of Harran, and representations on Babylonian *kudurru*-stones, indicate that this was a pan-Mesopotamian tradition in liturgical art, undoubtedly related to the center-of-the-world cosmological symbolism borne by the ziqqurrat, the type of the sacred mountain. For examples, see J. Börker-Klähn, *Alt Vorderasiatische Bildstelen und vergleichbare Felsreliefs*, *Baghdader Forschungen* 4, 1982, nos. 163. 206. 230; K. Kohlmeyer, *Drei Stelen mit Sin-Symbol aus Nordsyrien*, in: B. Hrouda, S. Kroll and P. Z. Spanos, eds., *Von Uruk nach Tuttul: Eine Festschrift für Eva Strommenger*, Studien und Aufsätze von Kollegen und Freunden, 1992, 94 ff., pl. 39.3, 5; Seidl, *Kudurru-Reliefs*, no. 26, fig. 3 (*Arkeoloji Müzeleri* 2232). The top of the so-called Black Obelisk of Shalmaneser III (BM 118885) is carved in the likeness of a stepped temple-tower.

³⁹ E. Porada, *Battlements in the Military Architecture and in the Symbolism of the Ancient Near East*, in: *Essays in the History of Architecture Presented to Rudolf Wittkower*, D. Fraser, H. Hibbard and M. J. Lewine, eds., 1967, 1:1–12.

⁴⁰ Assur 14844: Andrae, *Altmesopotamische Zikkurat-Darstellungen*, 46–47.

⁴¹ J. N. Postgate, *CTN* 3, no. 87: 27, commentary and additional examples p. 147.

⁴² See the remarks in J. Friberg, *Mathematik*, *RIA* 7:552, and K. R. Nemet-Nejat, *Cuneiform Mathematical Texts as a Reflection of Everyday Life in Mesopotamia*, *AOS* 75, 1993, 13: »... Babylonian mathematics lacks basic geometrical terms and concepts. It has no word for angle or slope ... [it] has no term to describe the idea of perpendicularity or parallelism either.«

⁴³ CAD 10/2, 135; AHw 2, 662; Friberg, *Mathematik*, 552 f. 566.

through the circumlocution *mala uštamḫiru ušappil*, »as much as I made square, I went deep«. ⁴⁴ Lack of an Akkadian word for the concept suggests that the cube had little currency for the speakers. The cosmological symbolism of the ark, if it is based on the cube, is apparently unique in cuneiform literature. That, of course, is no proof that the author of SB Gilg or his sources did not imaginatively conceive of the ark as a cube. It is the office of high art to excel the commonplace and to conceive of what has heretofore been inconceivable. A notable difficulty with the Assyriological *communis opinio*, however, is that a cuboid ark is culturally blank, wholly lacking in the cosmological symbolism that suffuses the language and architectural conventions of the Mesopotamian temple, and that is part and parcel of the motif of cosmogonic reversal which is the narrative dynamo of the deluge theme. ⁴⁵

Contemporary Representations of Ziqqurrats

The E-sagil Tablet, attested in two Late Babylonian duplicates (AO 6555 and BM 40813), despite its name is a metrological description of Ē.temen.an.ki, the great ziqqurrat of Marduk in Babylon. ⁴⁶ In lines sixteen through twenty-four, the dimensions of the ziqqurrat are computed in terms of length, breadth and height according to *aslu* and *aru* cubit-standards, which linear-based area measures are converted into the capacity-surface system, all dimensions being equal. Lines thirty-six through forty-two give the length, breadth and height of each stage in terms of *nindanu*, probably based on the *aslu* cubit-standard. ⁴⁷ At no point in the text is an effort made to describe explicitly the slope or batter of the structure. Lines sixteen through twenty-four, if interpreted without reference to the stages in the final section or prior knowledge that the structure is a ziqqurrat, appears to describe a perfect cube.

Two ziqqurrat groundplans, fair representatives of the well-attested bird's-eye view groundplan tablets from ancient Mesopotamia, have been published. ⁴⁸ HS 200a (1), a

⁴⁴ Friberg, *Mathematik*, 566. Neither the CAD (excluding the unpublished lemmas under »r«) nor the AHW consider any of the derived forms based on ordinal *rebû* or cardinal *erbû* as signifying a »cube«.

⁴⁵ The common royal epithet *šar erbeti arba'il*, »king of the four quarters«, like *šar kiššati*, is an image of totality, but conveys nothing of a universe with six sides and eight corners. Cryptic texts in which each of the four cardinal winds are said to serve one of the major Babylonian deities (Anu, Enlil, Enki/Ea and other deities) bespeak the scribal fascination with the four quarters, but provide no evidence for cosmogonic cubes; for the texts, see STT 400 rev. 37–40 and duplicate K 8397 1–4, cited in Livingstone, *Mystical and Mythological*, 75. Another such text cited by Livingstone and published by J. Nougayrol, *Les quatre vents*, RA 60 (1966), 73 rev. 3'–6' (a Louvre text, no museum number supplied) is part of a larger MA(?) work that Nougayrol believes to have been composed at the dedication of a *šahūru*-temple (73, rev. 2'), possibly a penthouse temple located atop a ziqqurrat (not all *šahūrus* were built on ziqqurrats, however). The four-square structure of a ziqqurrat and its height might easily have inspired literary figures on the four winds.

⁴⁶ See now the edition and excellent commentary on this text in George, *Texts*, 1992, 109–119. 414–434; on the metrology, see especially M. A. Powell, *Metrological Notes on the Esagila Tablet and Related Matters*, ZA 72 (1982), 106–123.

⁴⁷ See the discussion in George, *Texts*, 430.

⁴⁸ For twenty-one examples of temples, palaces and other structures, ranging in date from the Old Assyrian to the Late Babylonian periods, see E. Heinrich and U. Seidl,

damaged Nippur tablet from the Hilprecht Collection, depicts a series of seven nested equi-distant squares. ⁴⁹ The innermost square is divided into a »courtyard« flanked by two series of rectangular chambers with entryways marked. The drawing is probably meant to depict a seven- or eight-stage ziqqurrat. The badly damaged VAT 8322 + 12886 shows six nested equi-distant squares or rectangles drawn with double lines; the restored inscription along the top edge reads »ziqurrat of Marduk«. ⁵⁰ There is sufficient space in the missing central section of the tablet for an additional nested square or two to have been present on the original drawing. The ruler-perfect symmetry of the stages matches neither the dimensions of the metrological E-sagila Tablet nor the surviving Neo-Assyrian and earlier repairs to the ziqqurrat itself. ⁵¹ Neither drawing attempts to indicate the height of the individual temple tower stages. The Neo-Babylonian tablet BM 38217 provides a schematic lateral illustration of a seven-stage ziqqurrat, identified only as the *šubat Anšar*. ⁵² The dimensions of each stage are written as interlinear notations. As in Ē.temen.an.ki, the length, breadth and height of this small ziqqurrat are equal. The purpose of the text is unclear; Wiseman suggests that the smallness and regularity of the dimensions (the height of each stage is 6 cubits) indicates that it is not modeled on an actual structure, but instead describes an »ideal« ziqqurrat. Both HS 200a (1) and VAT 8322 + 12886 are equally ideal in their perfect symmetry, the latter an »ideal« Ē.temen.an.ki whose symmetrically proportionate stages conflict with the »real« groundplan of the E-sagila Tablet. These drawings tell us more about how the contemporary scribes conceptualized the shape of the temple tower, a Gestalt characterized by regularity and proportionality in all dimensions, than the physical object itself. Within the usage of Akkadian scribal conventions, it is possible to represent a ziqqurrat as a structure whose breadth equals length equals height, as is the ark of Uta-napišti: context determines the meaning.

In parting, for the sake of fair play, let us accept the reading that Uta-napišti's ark is shaped like a cube, and ask whether there was any architectural correlate, real or ideal, that might have made such an image meaningful to a SB Gilg audience. The penthouse storey of the *šubat Anšar* in BM 38217, presumably the *šahūru* or ziqqurrat temple, is a perfect cube, an exceedingly rare architectural configuration, judging from the dimensions of temples and palaces that have survived in Akkadian texts. Whether temple tower or cube, the nautical impossibility in SB Gilg XI works as a dramatic narrative realization of the Mesopotamian temple.

I sympathize with the philologically unexceptionable reading of Mr. Hendel and others who find in Uta-napišti's ark a vast cube vaguely fraught with cosmological symbol-

Grundrißzeichnungen aus dem Alten Orient, MDOG 98 (1967), 24–45, and idem, *Grundriß-Zeichnungen*, in: RLA 4:664a–668b.

⁴⁹ J. Oelsner, *Ein Zikkurrat-Grundriß aus Nippur*, *Forschungen und Berichte (Sraatl. Museen zu Berlin)* 24 (1984), 63–65. On paleographic criteria Oelsner dates the tablet no earlier than the Old Babylonian period, perhaps early in the Kassite period (65).

⁵⁰ L. Jakob-Röst, *Zur Zikkurrat von Babylon*, *Forschungen und Berichte* 24 (1984), 59–62.

⁵¹ Many attempts at paper reconstruction of the original Etemenanki have been made by combining the measurements of the E-sagila Tablet, the archaeological evidence with its confusing strata of repairs and modifications, and metrological evidence based on average brick measurements; for the most ambitious effort to date, see Schmid, *Tempelturm Etemenanki*, passim, together with the addition of the E-sagila Tablet and commentary in George, *Texts*, 109–119. 414–434.

⁵² D. J. Wiseman, *A Babylonian Architect?*, *AnSt* 22 (1972), 141–147; idem, *Nebuchadrezzar and Babylon*, Schl., 1983, 72.

ism. But SB Gilg is not a metrological exercise like the E-sagila tablet or a deed of sales that describes a house by its exterior dimensions and the street it faces, but is instead a literary masterpiece that assumes an audience whose referential worldview encompassed the realia of temples and temple-tower symbolism, an audience capable of successfully negotiating a narrative world of multiple – and culturally specific – entendre, where the *apsû* may serve as a place of refuge for the chosen of Ea and a ship with seven storeys may be more than a simple geometrical solid.

The interpretation of Uta-napišti's ark in Gilg XI.58 as a cube, a simple geometrical solid, is not as simple as the philology suggests. The literary frame of Gilg together with the narrative body is shot through with allusions to temples, as is the Atrahasis Epic, and it is within the cosmological world of the Mesopotamian temple, specifically that of the ziqqurrat, that the flood story in Gilg XI, and the structure of the ark, has meaning. The cultural ubiquity of the ziqqurrat is contrasted with the obscure role of the cube in Akkadian Mesopotamian mathematics and art; the ambiguous representation of ziqqurrats in 2nd–1st millennium drawings and descriptions is compared with that of the ark in Gilg. Conclusion: Uta-napišti's ark functions as a cosmic temple whose shape is best visualized as that of a ziqqurrat.

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